

SIR!

A MAGAZINE
FOR MALES

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By JACK RITCHIE

SIM was eight months old the first time I saw him. After a year of test drilling for oil in west Texas, I managed to get some time off to visit my sister Charlotte and her husband Ted.

"Sim?" I asked.

"Yes," Ted said. "As in simple. But he's definitely not."

Simon Peter Keith, known as Sim, was on the floor of the living room piling blocks one on top of another into a neat pyramid. His amber eyes met mine incuriously for a moment and then he turned back to his blocks.

He was large for his age. Even I who knew nothing about babies could see that. His skin was sleek tan and his hair yellow-brown. His stubby, broad fingers moved over the pyramid without fumbling.

I had the distinct impression that he was bored.

Ten-year-old Ted, Jr., Charlotte's only other child, and better known as Junior, spoke through the slot of the toy space helmet he was wearing. "He can walk already," Junior said.

I raised an eyebrow. "I'll bet."

"No kidding," Ted said. "Sim, come over here to your uncle Jim."

Sim carefully put another block into place and then got slowly to his feet. He walked toward me steadily and with complete control of balance.

"The doctor says he's never seen such remarkable development," Charlotte said proudly. "Physically he's more advanced than a two-year-old. And mentally too, if you ask me."

I picked up Sim and found that he was astonishingly heavy. He stared at me, his face expressionless. A faint indeterminable scent came from his skin. I put Sim back on his feet.

We moved into the dining room where Charlotte had the table set for

(Continued on page 54)



Sim

Sim's father lit a cigarette and his fingers trembled. Sim's mother said, "I'm afraid of him—afraid of my own son." Soon I learned the reason why!



Sim's eyes were bright and his lips moved in imitation of the lion's jaws. Flecks of saliva appeared at the corners of his mouth. 33

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SIM

(Continued from page 32)

dinner. Junior took off his space helmet and put it on a vacant chair.

Ted lifted Sim into his highchair and Charlotte put a plate of chopped veal and vegetables on his plate.

"He seems to dote on meat," Charlotte said.

"Do you believe in flying saucers?" Junior wanted to know.

"I hate to disappoint you," I said, "But I don't. They're just a combination of weather balloons and mass hysteria."

Junior thought about that. "Don't you think we could be invaded from outer space?"

I buttered a slice of bread. "Chances are that the crews of invading space ships would die of old age before they got here."

Junior pulled out a trump card. "If they went *with* time, maybe. But suppose they go *through* time? You know what I mean?"

"Don't worry about the invasion," I said. "We have our jets and guided missiles, our atom and hydrogen weapons, and the Lord knows what else. "But what if they're invisible or something like that?"

Sim had eaten all of his meat and now he regarded the spoon in his hand with dim interest.

"Eat your vegetables, Sim," Charlotte said.

Sim began eating his vegetables.

I SPENT my entire vacation with them and then I returned to Texas. I went through four more months there and then my company transferred me to an oil development project in Venezuela.

Consequently it was almost two years before I once again had the opportunity to visit them. As soon as I set foot in the States, I took the first plane north. I debated about sending a telegram, but finally decided I'd surprise them instead.

I was taking a taxi to their place early on a Sunday afternoon, when the cab passed Junior sitting on some cement steps about two blocks from the house. I had the driver stop and paid him off.

Carrying my suitcases, I walked back to where Junior was sitting.

His head rested on his hands and he stared moodily at the sidewalk.

His shoulders jerked as my feet came into view and he looked up, his eyes wide with alarm.

"Hi," I said. "How's the spaceman?"

Small dark circles fringed his eyes. "Hello, Uncle Jim," he said. He appeared relieved to see that it was only me.

"Is there something the matter?" I asked, frowning.

He hesitated and then shook his head. "I'm not sure."

"Anything wrong with your father or mother?"

"No," he said. "They're all right, I guess."

"Then it's Sim?"

He looked down at the sidewalk and swallowed. His dark eyes refused to meet mine. "I'm scared," he said. "Real scared."

I put my hand on his shoulder. "What are you afraid of?"

"You'll see," Junior said.

"Let's go home," I said. "We'll see what we can do about this."

Fear flickered into his eyes. "You go ahead. I'll come later on." He rose tiredly and walked away from me. His small shoulders disappeared around the corner.

SIM was on the front porch when I arrived at the house and I stopped in my tracks when I saw him. He was big now, bigger than Junior and his hair was long and a dirty lemon color.

He sat in the sun on the floor of the porch, his back against the side of the house. His eyelids were slit and amber lights glowed from behind the lashes.

"I don't suppose you remember me," I said.

His eyelids moved a trifle. "I remember," he said, his voice low and shadowy. "Uncle Jim."

His unwavering stare made me slightly uneasy. "Are your father and mother at home?"

Sim waited a while before he answered. "Yes," he said. He made no move to get up.

Ted came to the screen door and peered out. "Hello, Jim," he said quietly. "I thought I heard you talking." His voice bore the blur of weariness. "Come inside."

The appearance of both Ted and Charlotte shocked me. They were both thinner and their faces were

lined with wearing anxiety.

"Now look here," I said, sternly. "What's this all about? You people look ready for the hospital. Every one of you, except Sim."

I looked at them more closely. "Has it something to do with Sim?"

Ted lit a cigarette and his fingers trembled. "You saw him."

"All right," I said. "I'll admit he's big for his age."

"There's something more," Ted said. "I'm not sure what it is, but there's something more."

"I'm afraid of him," Charlotte said slowly. "Afraid of my own son."

I forced myself to smile. "I'll talk to the boy and get to the bottom of this. If you'll lend me your car, I'll take Sim for a ride and we can get acquainted all alone."

Ted sat down at the kitchen table. His hands closed and opened restlessly for half a minute. Then he reached in his pocket and put the car keys on the table.

Sim was still on the porch, relaxed and breathing evenly. I jingled the car keys. "On your feet, Sim," I said. "Let's see if this town's changed in two years."

He watched me with a lack of interest. Then at last he rose and followed me softly to the car at the curb.

I DROVE about aimlessly for half an hour, trying to get Sim to talk. It was impossible. He preferred merely to sit and watch the scenery. A strange musty odor in the car annoyed my memory.

I turned into the city park and made my way through the heavy traffic until I could find a parking space.

"That's the zoo over there," I said. "Ever seen it?"

His head turned in the direction I was pointing. "Yes," he said. "I have been here."

We left the car and walked down the crowded path. I stopped at the nearest stand and bought Sim an ice cream cone.

He took it from my hand and began licking it. His tongue made a rasping sound as it came into contact with the cone.

Sim followed me indifferently through the bird and monkey houses. He observed the elephant and the rhinoceros with impassivity.

When we came to the lions Sim halted. The keeper was tossing rubbery chunks of crimson horse meat to one of the animals.

The large tawny beast crouched over the flesh and tore at it viciously. His tail twitched as he ate.

I looked down at Sim and stiffen-

ed. His eyes were bright and his lips moved in sympathetic imitation of the lion's jaws. Flecks of saliva appeared at the corners of his mouth.

I turned quickly back to the cage. The animal's large mouth mauled at the meat, and then he stopped. His head lifted and his wide yellow tinted eyes stared unblinkingly at us.

It came to me with a start that he was really staring at Sim.

I gripped the guard rail and began talking. "That's a lion," I said, my voice tight. "The King of the Beasts."

I smelled the musty scent of the lion's cage and wetness came to the palms of my hands as I remembered. "The King of the Beasts," I repeated nervously.

"Yes," Sim's husky voice came from beside me. "King of the Beasts. Simba."

Our eyes met. Sim's lips were wide in a grin. His large teeth were tinged with yellow.

I tore my eyes away from the grinning face and looked for relief at the people around us; the adults and the children. Children who laughed and played and chased each other up and down the corridors.

And I saw the other children who were not children.

They sat quietly on benches where the sun streamed through the windows. They had hair of dirty lemon and heads and shoulders too big for children.

They sat and watched and I knew they were waiting.

God, I thought with horror, how many of them are there?

Sim's hand closed over mine and I felt the hard nails. "Come, Uncle Jim," he said. "Come."

I went numbly where he led me. We passed the happy children and the happy parents. And we passed the parents who had the gnawing fright of the unknown in their eyes.

We passed the other ones and they watched us go.

We left the building and we walked until Sim found a place of no people. A place of trees, a tunnel of trees, and a tall figure waited for us at the end of it.

He was large, he was huge, and he had coarse amber hair. His eyes were yellow-brown and his hands were in the pockets of his coat.

Sim spoke to him. "He is one who knows," Sim said, his hand firmly on my arm. "He knows."

The giant took his hands out of his pockets.

But they were not hands.

He lifted one of them and struck.

THE END

The Man Who Climbed Mt. Everest Alone

(Continued from page 27)

est. Then in 1933 when he felt thoroughly fit, he bought a plane with which he proposed to fly to the foot of Everest. He took flying lessons and got his pilot's license. With 40 hours logged up, Maurice Wilson felt he was ready.

He learned that the Nepalese Government was unlikely to give him permission to make the attempt on Everest so Wilson decided not to ask for it. He planned to take off from England, ostensibly on a flight to Australia, but the news got out and into the papers. Well-meaning officialdom now took a hand in trying to prevent Wilson from making his suicidal attempt.

U NDAUNTED, Wilson took off and reached Cairo. There he found a check. He had been promised a permit to fly through Persia but now it was withdrawn. He flew to Bahrein on the Persian Gulf. Here he took off for Gwadar in

India with just enough petrol in his tanks to give him 30 miles to spare! He made it just before night closed in on the drome and with his tanks empty.

He flew to Karachi and here he was refused petrol to continue the flight. But somehow he got around it and reached Allahabad. Again he was refused petrol but circumvented it and reached Purnea in northern India.

Here Wilson's plane was seized and impounded and held until the torrential monsoonal rains arrived—a period of three weeks. Officials then released the plane on the assumption that no one would dare to fly in such boisterous weather.

They didn't know Wilson's quality. He filled his tanks and said he was taking off for Darjeeling. But the engine wouldn't start. Wilson knew nothing about engineering. He spent half a day in the hangar reading the instruction book and